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C O N F I D E N T I A L DJIBOUTI 001289

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CENTCOM FOR POLAD HOLZMAN; STATE FOR AF AND AF/E

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SUBJECT: MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER ON RECENT U.S. AND CUBA VISITS

REF: STATE 213112

Classified By: Ambassador Marguerita D. Ragsdale.  
For reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) In a meeting October 6 with Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ali Abdi Farah, Ambassador asked for the Minister's impression of his and President Guelleh's recent trip to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), which also included stops in Washington and Cuba. Farah spoke in general terms about the activities at UNGA and about President Guelleh's speech, a matter of public record. Ambassador commented that she thought it had been a comprehensive speech. Farah also gave an account of Guelleh's meeting with Department of State Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Newman which dovetailed reftel. Farah added that the President had exchanged views with Under Secretary for Political Affairs Marc Grossman, who had commended him for Djibouti's role in the struggle against terrorism. (Note: Embassy Djibouti has not received a report of this exchange. End Note.)

12. (C) Farah stated that in Washington, Guelleh met with Senator Richard Lugar of Indiana, Senator John Warner of Virginia and Senator Carl Levin of Michigan. Farah was not able to give substantive details of the meetings, but offered the view that they had gone very well and that the Congressmen were very well versed on Djibouti and had discussed economic assistance, military cooperation, and cooperation in the global war against terrorism. He remarked that "one Congressman" had mentioned a point about the U.S.-Djibouti military agreement and that President Guelleh had queried what exactly the Congressman meant to say. "All in all," he said, "the meetings went well."

13. (C) On Guelleh's visit to Cuba, Farah told Ambassador that the purpose was mainly focused on establishing an exchange of doctors and possible medical training. He said there is great difficulty in finding medical schools that will accept Djiboutian students due to a lack of places available. However, Cuba has places and three years ago gave twenty spots to Djiboutians. Farah said the hope for these negotiations was to expand that number to forty, as well as negotiate a number of trained specialists to work in Djibouti. Currently there are five medical specialists from Cuba working in Djibouti. He commented that the Cuban doctors are not expensive and are very competent. The Government of Djibouti pays these doctors a small stipend and provides housing at their assigned locations in the outer districts.

14. (C) Farah mentioned that he would depart tomorrow for Nairobi to attend the Somalia conference where the transitional parliament will elect a new President of Somalia. A very large number had now been narrowed, according to Farah, to 28 - down from 70. Responding to Ambassador's inquiry, Farah said he was optimistic on the issue of Somalia because for the first time every faction is represented and everyone is participating. When asked what the future of the self-proclaimed Republic of Somaliland would be, Farah said, "we'll have to see." Farah said Somaliland has been functioning well for nearly 15 years, but relations with Somalia cannot be predicted until the new president is chosen. The identity and personality of the president will determine Somalia's course of action with Somaliland. Farah commented, "we will discuss it."

RAGSDALE